

What can I do to cope with my child's separation anxiety?

As an infant, parents notice that their children adapt well to alternate caregivers, but as they grow older, teary and tantrum-filled good-byes become more prominent. After their first birthday, it is common for children to develop separation anxiety where they will become distressed, cling to their parents, cry, and resist attention from others when their parents leave. However frustrating and upsetting, children's reluctance to separate from their parents is a healthy expression of their bond and attachment with them. When this occurs, parents experience an array of emotions, most oftentimes guilt for leaving. As a result, parents are quick to return and comfort their child numerous times or decide not to leave all together. Some parents are tempted to sneak away when their child is not looking, but these tactics will likely cause more anxiety.

In order to make things easier, parents are encouraged to say a loving and quick good-bye. Although most children will continue to cry and scream, this will likely subside within a few minutes. It's recommended that parents introduce their children to new caregivers gradually, so that they are comfortable. Likewise, parents should try not to leave children who are hungry or tired as this may exacerbate their departure. Parents should remain calm, be consistent, reassure their children that they will return, and provide a timeframe when they will do so. Eventually, children will learn that their parents always return when they leave, and these memories will be enough to comfort them when they're gone.